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THE INDIVIDUAL PUPIL AS THE UNIT OF SUPERVISION IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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For some decades the roadside schoolhouse stood as the symbol of salvation for our democracy. Now the monumental high school is proudly pointed out as evidence of our intention to do the right thing by our children. The one lacked almost everything except intimate contact between the teacher and the children; the other has almost everything except that one essential. In the country school, system was largely missing, but the individual pupil was important; in a great city high school, the system may be a triumph of executive ingenuity, but the boys and girls are merely counters passing through the machine.

Conscientious administrators and teachers are striving bravely against the tide of events to know and help their pupils. But they are themselves struggling against submersion. Many of our high schools have reached what the economist calls the point of diminishing return, that is, the point where each unit expended, be it the teacher's time, the pupil's effort, or the public's money, brings a decreasing dividend in actual human education.

In our high schools American love of big things has run riot, and the result is most serious and most wasteful. The superlative would not be justified were it not true that the high-school years are at once those in which education of the individual as such is most vital and those in which the cost of education is heaviest. The situation is not to be attributed to administrative blundering; it is part of the trend of American life all about us.

The individual pupil as the fundamental unit in supervision has been lost sight of through a variety of causes:

1. It is of the genius of the city that individuals do not count. Human life is lightly held; a serious catastrophe is the incident of a day. Nor does the city draw nice distinctions between those whom

it does take time to notice. The world leader, the screen comedian, and the latest homicide secure equal space on the front page. The city does not take its individuals seriously.

2. Failing to respect individuals for their distinctive characteristics, the city cannot assess correctly those elements in education which make for individualism. Education is education, a commodity to be furnished by certain employed persons to certain youths assembled in large buildings, in order that these youths may learn to make a living or prepare for college. Personal contacts, intimate teaching relations, friendly community spirit, close supervision, intensive training—these are values which are not widely recognized.

3. There is apparently no reason for limiting the size of the producing plant; the high-school principal seldom objects to expansion. On the other hand, the authorities find every reason for having as large a plant as possible. Taxes are high, real estate is high, administrative costs are high. The growth of certain towns has been phenomenal. The big school will be cheaper to run and it will be more prominent in every way and therefore more satisfying to the tax payers. And so a consolidation results which squeezes out of our high schools much of what is best and most worth retaining.

4. A new turn of thought and speech frankly ignores the individual as the major interest of our schools. With all propriety and in honest acceptance of the facts we discuss and undertake "mass education." The war has revealed a situation in which national greed demanding large profits to be drawn from cheap labor has left the schools with a burden out of all proportion to their resources. Rapid assimilation of our immigrants is demanded in the interest of a more wholesome economic and social situation. The big job must somehow be done, and done quickly; the individual must merge with the mass. Mass education is to be measured in the large. The startling revelations of comparative tables properly result in adjustments of policy which bring a higher ratio of promotions and a lower ratio of limitations. Only two ways for securing these corrected ratios are open: to have better teaching or to lower standards. The first being temporarily or locally unobtainable, the other is inevitable. Mass education carries with it, therefore, a process of leveling down. The hopeful view of this

phase of the problem is that we shall presently reach an average level from which we can steadily advance, a point of balance in mediocrity from which we can rise—unless in the meantime we further complicate the situation by accepting from foreign shores large groups who are below our lowest acceptable level.

5. Another influence affecting both our organization and our methods is the social ideal of education. We have come to think of schooling as a community enterprise managed for the good of the community. Individual welfare is subordinate to the group welfare. This is as it should be, but the planting of the group idea in the minds of some teachers has worked the practical elimination of the individual pupil as an object of serious concern. Furthermore, the application of the group idea in rating pupils on distribution curves not infrequently results in thorough disregard of sound standards of accomplishment and merit.

6. The departmental principle in teaching and administration has brought a notable improvement in the organization of material and in teaching technique. These gains are, however, somewhat neutralized by the impersonality of the whole régime with its exaggeration of self-defense in supervision. The teacher meets a pupil but once a day or less often; the "home-room teacher" does not necessarily ever teach the pupils for whom he is "at home"; the teacher's primary interest is too often in the subject rather than in the children; professional advancement rests upon the creation of textbooks and the perfection of technique. It is almost inescapable that the children come to be thought of as means rather than as ends.

7. Finally, there is the labor union attitude with its injection into school of the three union aims—more pay, shorter hours, limited output. The teaching profession is not entirely to blame for the spread of this attitude. The public is much more culpable. The widely accepted trade-union viewpoint, the niggardly policy of many communities in respect to teachers' salaries, the two-platoon school with its restrictions on plant, teachers, and time, the single session school with its short day, the unwillingness of parents to have pupils detained—these are facts against which the most generous teacher can make little headway. Some schools and teachers devise ways of meeting them, others deplore them as inevitable, and others frankly surrender and drift into a time-

serving, clock-watching frame of mind. In any case, the individual pupil loses out.

These influences may conceivably be beyond the power of the high-school principal to remove. Probably most of them must be accepted as part of the problem. In that event, the effects must so far as possible be counteracted. Different schools are facing the difficulty in different ways, with varying degrees of success. There is no doubt that we must go yet further if much of our enormous investment in high schools is not to be wasted on superficiality—indeed, we may say, if nation-wide secondary education is not to be devoted to the perpetuation of mediocrity.

At least part of the remedy for the conditions outlined above lies in the following:

1. On the part of the public, honest recognition of the facts and of their outcome.

2. On the part of school people, a reaction which shall bring renewed attention to the individual pupil as the primary and essential object of interest.

3. A revival in the schools of an administrative and instructional technique which shall emphasize the individual boy and girl instead of the class or the section or the subject or the special enterprise in which the school takes pride.

Let us see what these involve.

The public must be educated to a real sense of school values, which education can be accomplished only through the propagandist efforts of those who are actually administering the schools.

The people who support the schools and who send their children to be educated must be brought to an understanding of certain things: that education is a highly individualistic experience, not merely a commodity to be carried away; that this experience cannot be best provided under the high-speed, over-crowded, mechanized conditions of the shoe factory; that an investment which establishes and perpetuates the factory system, far from being economical, is actually wasteful.

Having arrived at these convictions, a community will reward progressive leadership in realistic and concrete fashion. It will furnish building space and equipment so that each pupil may go to school all day. The two-platoon, half-day high school will disappear. The largest high-school building will, within the limits

of the wealth and geography of the town, be built to accommodate from 500 to 1,000 pupils. When there are many more than 1,000 high-school pupils in town, a second school will be furnished, in order that the maximum return on the town's investment shall be assured. The community will furthermore take pains to assure this return by insisting on a long school day for teachers and pupils. And it will furnish a reasonable ratio of teachers to pupils, say 1 to 25. The principal will also be given adequate clerical and supervisory assistance so that he may be free for personal contact with his school and acquaintance with his pupils. However free the principal be, he will be expected so to organize his school as to provide faculty members who have an actual responsibility for personal work with groups of pupils. If local conditions make a large school unavoidable, this school will be formally subdivided into administrative units of reasonable size.

The above program, claiming no originality, will draw the reply that all these things are already done. This is true in individual communities with, shall we say, more than the average sense of educational values. But as a nation, we have gone in for big things—for large-scale production. We have sacrificed craftsmanship in order to get the job done. Before the program can become a generally established fact, we must sacrifice our pride in the merely big and develop a sincere respect for the human and the reasonable. Incidentally, we shall have to revise our tax laws.

A certain portion of the public resorts to private schools. These have long enjoyed prosperity in the East. It is, however, significant that almost every large city of the Middle West (a section which prides itself on its patronage and support of democratic, progressive, popular schooling) has now a thriving private school of comparatively recent origin. There is no evidence that either the democratic or the progressive spirit of the West is changing. Is it perhaps true that thoughtful parents are discovering that in the great high school their boy or girl is not a real person but merely a name on the records? The remedy which they adopt is, of course, worse than none so far as the community's schools are concerned, for it not only does nothing to make the schools better but removes from them what interest and influence these parents might have exerted. Nevertheless, the fact has weight, since it quite definitely suggests a need in our high schools and a way out.

The high school must approach its task with something of the sense of contractual obligation which the better private school demonstrates. We have had too much of the hotel and too little of the family in our high schools. We have done the job pretty well, extensively, but not intensively. We need in the high schools among executives and teachers a quite definite return to the sense of personal responsibility for pupils. Those whose professional philosophy carries them back along this line feel very strongly that they are close to the fundamental element in successful school-keeping, whether this be considered in its instructional, disciplinary, or administrative phases.

The first essential to an adjustment in our planning within the school is a clear notion of the actual nature of a high-school group. It is in no sense a fusion but is a conglomerate; it may at any time disintegrate. For example, consider a recitation section of, let us say, twenty boys with a man teacher. The morale of that section, i.e., its attitude toward the teacher, its general behavior, its industry and results, is not a group response but the sum total of individual reactions. The inspiration or the bedevilment of the group rests not on mob psychology but on the ability or inability of the teacher to convince each boy that he, the teacher, is deserving of respect, that he means business, that his subject is worth while, that it can be learned, that it must be learned. Assuming that the teacher has acceptable personal and technical qualifications, his success in securing these convictions depends not on any general or impersonal handling of the group but on his setting up between each of the twenty and himself personal wireless systems over which by eye, voice, posture, manner, and dress he will send not one but twenty telepathic dispatches.

It is, of course, not intended to assert that there is in school no such thing as group consciousness or group response. Much of what is accomplished is done through group loyalty, "school spirit," the tradition of obedience, and the atmosphere of courtesy. But in the last analysis the social, intellectual and moral tone of our schools depends on the appeal to the individual. Confidence of accomplishment, appreciation of the better things, fear of punishment, surrender to temptation, bad manners, persistence in the face of failure—these and most other human phenomena of school

life are individualistic and personal demonstrations best curbed or stimulated by direct, face to face contacts.

The specific limitations of even a few individuals within a class must set the standard and to a considerable extent dictate the organization of the class, the length of the assignments, the method of lesson presentation and of discussion, the system of grading. It is not enough to say that a subject must be taught in a certain way, that all must deliver or go under, that technique must be preserved at all costs. In the classroom as on the battle-field that leader is most valuable who wins his victories with the fewest losses. For those who will say that this is but a restatement of the obvious, it may be well to point out that many Latin teachers are still trying to fit children to the subject rather than the subject to children, that many physics teachers still deplore the attempts to give simplified physics to Freshmen and Sophomores, that many manual work teachers still insist on indifferent effort spent on conventional problems instead of enthusiastic labor devoted to a boy's own original project.

It is trite to say that, in order to analyze groups and diagnose problems accurately, the high-school administrator and teacher must have a real knowledge of the physiology and psychology of adolescence, as well as a competent understanding of the learning process. And yet every year there come to our high schools, collegians and experienced teachers whose chief interest is their subject and whose chief lack is a clear sense of the real nature of boys and girls. These people and the schools in which they teach are not destined for a large success until they have learned to regard their pupils, not as a class, but as unique personalities entitled to quite the same courtesy, consideration, and attention as themselves.

The actual process of coming to know our pupils is a difficult one, administratively, even in a school of five hundred pupils. But it is not impossibly difficult, and many schools develop a fairly penetrating and comprehensive acquaintance with the personal factors involved. Accepting the obligation, the school strives to learn as much as possible of the human inheritance—physical, mental, moral, and aesthetic—which its boys and girls bring with them. It discovers at first hand something of the home environments and economic limitations among which lessons are learned and ambitions nourished. It takes accurate account of the physical details

affecting pupils' work, the facts of growth, hygiene, and general health. It quite definitely attempts to discover the mental assets and liabilities of its pupils, their powers of memory and reason, their speech and manual facility, their response to different types of knowledge, in order to offer vocational guidance and training appropriate to the abilities revealed. It seeks to know as a very real thing the volitional and moral fiber of each pupil, his will to succeed, his power of attention, his stamina under difficulties. It learns somewhat of the social nature of boys and girls, their reaction to the world about them, their friendships, their temptations, their recreational tastes and habits.

The responsibility for a school's attitude toward its individual pupils lies largely with the principal. True, he may work under distinct limitations imposed by those above him, but he will not surrender to these completely. Accepting facts temporarily, he will exert his influence and his powers of leadership to secure such modification of the facts as will make them contribute to his plans. In his dealings with the community he will emphasize persons, not numbers. He will oppose the growth of his own school to unreasonable size and will not peacefully accept the two-platoon and short-session school. He will publicly refer to education as an intimate, distinctive experience, not as a process. He will preach that mass education and the social group are best served by the development of a high order of individualism inspired with the ideal of service. Within his school he will insist that departmental efficiency and special technique be judged in terms of boys and girls successfully trained, and he will make it clear that each teacher is held personally responsible for failure to secure from this boy or that girl a result creditable within the limits of the child's ability.

Upon the principal rests also the responsibility for so organizing and administering the school as to give his convictions real effect in the emphasis placed upon the human side of the work. It is not a light obligation. The head of a large high school finds little time for the kindly paternalism of the old-time schoolmaster. He must be at once business manager, educational expert, and community leader.

If the principal believes that the welfare of the individual pupil is his chief concern, he will delegate to others as much as possible of other things and will keep an open office for the children, will

seek ways to keep in touch with a large number of parents, will devise a system of records and reports which will bring to his desk a maximum of human detail in a minimum of time, and will perfect such an organization as will provide the necessary intimate contacts with pupils. Patent devices and imported plans will not work. The system adopted must be suited to local conditions, to the character of the school and its work, to the physical facts of a plant already in existence, to the caliber and personality of the faculty, to the temperamental limitations and special abilities of the principal himself.

In offering the following series of devices in effective operation in one school or another, no claim to novelty or originality is made. Their value depends almost wholly on the spirit in which they are operated, on the point of view of the administration using them. For example, intelligence tests and psychological analyses may have the positive utility of affording a fact basis for organizing a boys' course, for modifying teaching methods, or for protecting the school against the weakness of a kleptomaniac, or they may have the merely negative utility of affording a basis for eliminations. The study of eliminations which reveals the fact that large numbers leave a certain high school "to go to work" gives nothing of importance until it goes deeply enough into the individual cases to make it possible to advise them of the wisdom or unwisdom of the decision to drop out, and to know *why* they went to work, and how the school curriculum, the school life, or the eccentric teacher must change in order to compete with "going to work."

A constructive problem closely connected with the problem of elimination is, of course, that of organizing a curriculum actually suited to the community. The individual pupil and his needs are the only proper basis for a curriculum policy. Quantitative studies will show for graduates and for those who drop out the vocations to which they immediately and eventually turn; other studies show the limitations in respect to language ability, etc., of those received from the grammar schools; still others reveal the results attained in high school by various groups and types of pupils and give ground for deciding whether a specific subject is justifying its existence and cost. The unit is in every case the individual pupil with all the evidence available concerning him and his kind.

One of the most difficult problems in large high schools is to keep in touch with the parents of the pupils. Some few are indifferent; most fathers are working all day and a visit at the school means loss of pay; not a few shrink from intruding or imposing on the busy principal; pupils generally discourage parental visits. As a result, parental calls have come to be associated with serious delinquency or deficiency. One high school takes the initiative and apportions among its faculty the homes represented; the teachers call at every home during the fall. Another school relieves a man and a woman of some academic obligations in order that they may become social service investigators for all sorts of cases. A woman dean in a large high school in the course of her dealings with difficult or weak girls goes directly home to several mothers each week. One principal in a school of nearly two thousand pupils reserves one day for office conferences with fathers and mothers, many of whom are requested to call. In another it is understood that parents will find their children's teachers free on a certain afternoon. An evening office hour once a week makes it possible for a principal to meet fathers. One school sends home weekly deficiency reports. Special reports on individual pupils are secured from teachers by the pupils themselves, shown to the principal, delivered at home in person and returned to the principal signed. The Parents and Teachers Association is found everywhere and has no small influence in many schools. The meetings of such associations do much to bring a common basis of understanding and to convince fathers and mothers that school is not a mere officialdom.

In his attempt to come into personal contact with his pupils, perhaps the principal's most subtle problem is to convince them that "the office" is not merely "the office" and that the principal is not merely "the man in the office." The difference in ages, the relation of authority, his constant absorption in desk work, his ultimate disciplinary function—these things children feel, and they stay away. One principal reserves an office hour for pupils at the close of each school day. Another makes it his business to mingle in all the extra-curricular life of the school, athletics, clubs, parties, trips, etc. Another assumes the advisership of the senior class, another of the freshman class. Another in a school of three hundred undertakes during the fall term an informal conference with every pupil, discussing lessons, personal interests, ambitions, school life.

It is obvious that in a large school such conferences would have to be delegated to others, but there is no doubt of their value. A boy or girl early comes to feel that someone is interested in him or her.

There are all sorts of records and reports. Certain data are essential to a comprehensive knowledge of any single pupil or group of pupils. A brief personal as well as graded record from the grammar school gives a real basis for class organization and the approval of electives. Abnormalities revealed in health, physical examination, and absence reports should early come to the attention of the principal or his executive lieutenants. Deficiency and delinquency reports and special reports from teachers on individual pupils follow each other across the principal's desk in rapid succession. The study-room teachers are in a position to give vital information as to the reasons for failures in classes. A record of the distribution of average grades which makes it possible to determine each pupil's relative position in his group is found helpful in dealing with pupils, parents, and teachers. Personal knowledge of the individual pupils of any group is almost essential to the intelligent and just use of distribution curves in marking systems, and curves are not sound criteria of a teacher's judgment until they are supplemented by acquaintance with the individuals represented.

One of the most concrete and convincing ways for principals and department heads to bring to their teachers a sense of accomplishment or lack of accomplishment is to make a record of observations in terms of individual pupil reactions. A "socialized recitation" may be exceedingly vivacious through the ready interest of the class in the assertiveness of a few, but the sum total of effective participation may be very small. An individualistic analysis of the period shows that a small fraction of the class carried the hour, and that even the enthusiastic efforts of this fraction produced less than 50 per cent of correct statements. A series of such observations showing for several visits the same low fraction of attention, of participation, and of success, must soon convince both principal and teacher that the *individuals* in the class are not getting the work, though the recitations may superficially seem to be admirable.

In whatever degree of intensiveness a principal observes or analyzes the instructional and disciplinary procedure of his teachers, the essential criterion for judgment is pupil reaction. The sequence of operation is cause and effect, but the sequence of investigation

is from effect to cause. The superiority of this or that method of presentation, the utility of one device or another, the value of Miss A. or Mr. B. in handling a given situation—these are decisions to be based almost wholly on the response from the pupils. The worth of a teacher is determined, not by what she can do, but by what she can get the young people to do.

In no other detail, perhaps, is it more important to consider individuals than in the administration of examinations. Here physical, temperamental, and parental elements must always be considered if serious injustice is not to be done this one or that one. For the sake of a certain fraction of every group, final examinations, when given as part of school policy, should be treated as an ordinary incident of the course, not as a special crisis likely to result in irretrievable consequence. (It is, of course, true that one never knows what a child's parents are doing behind one's back.) The grading of the papers and weighting of the examination in the final average must, in the nature of things, be reasonably uniform, but there should always be left the chance for making exceptions in individual cases.

Various efforts are being made, and wisely, to put our marking and credit systems upon an individualistic basis. No better mathematical device for the accomplishment of this purpose has been found than the system by which excess credit is given for merit above a certain parity and discounted credit given for poor work. Compared with the conventional system this is marking on a piece-work instead of on a time basis. It gives an actual bonus for superior accomplishment and makes a direct appeal to individual ambition.

Most schools have for a long time tried to show what sort of persons their pupils were by reporting, numerically or literally, such values as "conduct," "attitude," and "effort." Certain private schools have recently attempted to go much further in devising terms and report forms which shall express to parents the school's judgment as to the development of individuality in their children. One school rates, verbally, from excellent to unsatisfactory, such abilities as "congregating, languaging, acquiring, creating, pairing, playing" and asks the parents of its pupils to report on the pupil's "courtesy, cheerfulness, promptness, appearance, obedience, use of spare time, etc." Another school rates by scale such abilities as the

ability "to get along with people," "to contribute to the general good," "to plan work on problems or projects," "to work wholeheartedly," "to control physical self," etc. Probably no large school could undertake the detail involved in such reports, but the intelligent teacher will take a mental inventory of these and other qualities among her children and will be prepared to assist her principal in arriving at right conclusions in dealing with individual children.

It is obvious that in a very large school, the principal cannot personally follow any considerable proportion of his pupils, unless he divests himself of almost everything else. He will, then, organize on lines which will charge others with the supervision of pupils, although this will leave him more than ever "the man in the office." If he is shrewd, he will have one or more women as immediate assistants in an executive capacity. The dean of girls, or the woman assistant principal, is one of the most helpful members of the whole staff. Quite aside from the value of having at hand a woman's intuition and judgment, there are elements in the school life where a man's sense is of little value, and there are disciplinary and personal problems among the girls of his school in which he is not only out of place but useless. This is as true in the high school of three hundred as in one of three thousand.

Various supervisory systems have been worked out, ranging from the centralized school with a principal and several assistants using the same office to the actual subdivision of the school into four quite separate units, each with its own study-hall, class interests, and vice-principal. The assignment of "home-room teachers" is most common and, in operation, sometimes one of the most perfunctory devices in use. Class advisers are not infrequently officers for so large a group with such a multiplicity of enterprises on foot as to preclude any personal contact with the members of the class other than the pupil officers. A fairly effective scheme is the "group adviser," charged with direct responsibility for, and intimate personal knowledge of, a selected group of say thirty pupils, their courses, vocational plans, deficiencies and difficulties, home conditions, etc., and also responsibility for keeping the principal informed concerning such members of the group as need special attention.

It is not true that any plan which will work in a school of five hundred can be quadrupled in a school of two thousand; there is an actual change in the nature of the community. But, assuming that the personal relations of the principal with his pupils are worth while in the smaller school, it is fair to say that a reasonable substitute for these relations can be offered through the good offices of several responsible group vice-principals. With these group principals both the pupils and their teachers will deal so far as the personal phases of school life are concerned. We shall have then, not only departmental heads administering the curriculum, but personnel heads in intimate contact with the human side of the school, both, of course, responsible to the principal.

For half a century American educators have tried to devise systems of promotion and transfers which should make it possible for children to move in accordance with their general capacity and special abilities. The problem of keeping the bright pupil busy and the slow pupil undiscouraged has been a difficult one. Certain of the plans tried have failed because they seemed to the supporting public to be administratively uneconomical. It is perhaps one of the compensations of our large schools that it is possible to organize many sections of the same subject and to differentiate these clearly in respect to content, method, and rate of progress. It is furthermore possible to do it not merely in one year but to carry the distinct groups through two or more years of high school. In the small and moderate-sized school, time-table difficulties soon arise, but these are not insurmountable.

Sound policy must provide for personal promotions on the basis of specific subjects passed and for a time-table which will permit not only a wide variety of combinations based on individual elections but also prompt adjustments, up or down, as the need is revealed. Only thus will the psychology of success operate.

Individual instruction, that is, instruction so planned and carried out as to assure each pupil a large portion of the teacher's time and a large measure of participation in the activities of the period, is still far from realization in most schools. The skilful teacher does, however, go far in this direction if the class is not overwhelmingly large. That modification of classroom technique known as supervised study, or better, co-operative learning, is, when well done, a distinct contribution to individualistic teaching.

The really expert teacher is enabled to go into the actual learning processes of his pupils with the result that he can help solve their difficulties, correct their methods of work, and stimulate proper habits. This skill may be supplemented, and usually is, in a reasonable amount of after-school work with troubled pupils, in faculty office hours, in free period conferences, in departmental deficiency study classes supervised by members of the department in rotation, even in Saturday morning appointments between teachers and pupils. Saturday morning has been traditionally sacred to late breakfasts or recreation, shopping appointments or extension courses. There is, however, no reason why it shouldn't be utilized when the needs of individual pupils and the convenience of individual teachers coincide. It is surprising how many young people are quite willing to go to school on Saturday morning when they feel a real benefit derived.

An attempt has been made to indicate a tendency of the times in our educational system, to show the need of a revival of interest in the sort of thing which the old-time school did very well (and indeed many small high schools today still do it well), and to suggest measures which are being found helpful. There is no need for summarizing. Suffice to say that policies and devices will amount to little unless they are instituted and carried out by school folk in the sincere conviction that neither systems, nor curricula, nor subjects, nor technique are of so great concern as is the individual boy or girl.